

JESUS AND THE RAGAMUFFIN CHILDREN

A rollicking story for children ages 7 to 83 1/2

by Blake Steele

Long ago, in the land of Israel, some rascally, ragamuffin children were playing by the sea and saw Jesus walking by.

"Wow! Isn't that Jesus?" shouted one of the boys. "My pa says he's God's son and that he does amazing things."

"Yeah, my mom heard he heals sick people with a word," said a little girl.

"Let's go see if it's true."

"Come on then," another boy shouted, and they all ran down a hill and gathered around him.

"Well, hello children," Jesus said, happy to be with them.

"Are you Jesus? Are you the man?" asked a tall boy.

"Yes I am," Jesus replied with a bright smile of joy.

"Are you really God's son?" asked a tiny girl, and then hid behind the skirts of another.

"Of course I am," Jesus said with a wink.

"Then, would you tell us about God?" asked the little girl's brother.

"Yes, yes," all the children chimed in. "Tell us about God and how to be happy and how you heal people and everything," a little girl shouted. They all started to giggle.

Jesus laughed. "Come, let's walk, and I'll tell you all about God and everything I love."

The children danced around as they followed the sea's seaweed slick shore.

One little girl named Ruth took Jesus by the hand. He looked down at the innocence and wonder in her eyes. "The kingdom of God belongs to children like you."

"What do you mean?" she asked with surprise.

"I mean that God is so innocent and free than most humans just can't understand Him. God is as fresh as this breeze blowing off the sea," he said with a wave of his hand, "And it's those with a child's heart who most naturally come to understand what's real."

"But, where is God?" another little boy asked.

"Watch carefully, and I'll show you," Jesus walked into the sea. Gazing down into the water, he put his hands slowly in, elbow deep, then quickly lifted up a big, silvery, slithery, wriggling fish. The children shouted with surprise.

"Where does this fish live? Jesus asked as he struggled to hold it.

"In the sea, silly," Ruth answered.

"Yes," and the fish breathes the sea, and water is in every bit of its body," Jesus said as he dropped the fish back in. It flipped its tail and splashed him, and in a flash was gone. Jesus laughed as he wiped water from his face.

"This is how we live in God and God lives in us," he said as he waded to the shore. "God is everywhere. He is in us and above us, below us, and all around, in the sky, below the ground: there is nowhere God is not."

He knelt down and took a little boy named Nathan in his arms, then motioned to the children to come near. "Now watch his eyes." The children gathered closer. Nathan looked nervously around. Then Jesus touched his forehead and little trickle of joy ran suddenly from the top of his head down, and he smiled.

"What did you see in his eyes when I touched him?" Jesus asked.

"They grew brighter," said a girl, "bright and shinny." All the others agreed.

"That's right, the Light in his eyes shown brighter at my touch. Do you know why?"

"No," all the children shouted.

“Because I am Light—the Light of life itself—and I am in you.”

“What? How can you be in me?” Nathan asked. “I’m the one that’s in me.”

The children laughed, and Jesus laughed too.

“Yeah, what do you mean, Jesus?” asked a tall boy named Jacob. “How can you be in us? That sounds kind of freaky.”

“Well, just look at each other. Can you see the Light of life in everyone’s eyes?”

They started grabbing each other’s faces, playfully pulling hair, putting forehead to forehead, staring eye to eye, and pushing each other all over the place.

Jesus laughed. “Well, can you see it?” he asked.

“Yes, I see what you mean, Jacob answered.

“Yeah, we all have light in our eyes,” the children shouted.

“Well, what is that Light, and where does it come from?”

"We don't know, said Ruth."

"I am that Light and it comes from God. The Light that you're seeing comes from the brightness of His being—and you are that Light too.

"I'm not a tailor or a baker, a fisherman or a priest, a politician or a potter, or a chicken in a pen," Jesus said with a laugh and the children giggled again. "What I am is life: your own Light of life shouting, 'You are in me, and I am in you.' I tell you by God's sacred name, all I say is true. I am here to show the world what this Light of life you are actually can do."

"You mean we are really made of light and not just made of clay?"

"Yes. Like a hand in a glove, you are the Light of life clothed in bodies. Though you walk in night, the daystar shines within. No human folly, ignorance or sin can put it out, not even fear, or grief or doubt. Does that make sense?"

"Kind of," Jacob answered. The rest of the children were mumbling and talking it over, trying to come through ruminations to their own conclusions.

“Well, if we are the Light that you are,” Nathan said, and the children giggled and shouted at the thought, “Just what are we really like, then? Are we candles, fireflies, or stars? I think we must be stars!”

Jesus put his hand on Nathan’s head. “Well, it’s just about exactly what you said. You are Love that needs to know it. The Light of life you are shines down from worlds above, and is nothing short of peaceful, pure and simple Love.”

“Love,” the children shouted. “Are we really Love?”

“Yes, yes, you are in God, and always shall be. And God is beautiful, huge and free. What is now below can grow to be above, in genuine, 100%, naturally good Love: and I am Love, playing always before the face of our Father: dancing in the stars and in every place of peace, full of happiness, healing and release; shouting and singing a song the world can’t hear, hidden by the darkness, yet always warm and near.”

“I love to play too,” Nathan said, and Jesus laughed.

“If you love to play and we love to play, can we all play together?” Ruth asked.

“Yes, yes. Play in my joy. Play in the love and happiness that only Light can bring. Say it, sing it, dance it, prance it,” Jesus said as he stood up and twirled about. All the children joined with him, and they danced and shouted on the rim of the shore.

“Come. I know of a creek that is always laughing as it flows from the mountains to the sea. Let’s go and laugh with it. I think it has some timely lessons to tell,” Jesus said, then spun around and walked into the bright, summer-gold fields with grasshoppers clattering up all around him. The children looked around, as if asking each other, “Should we, could we?” then all nodded yes at the same time and ran, jumping and skipping after him.

Before long they came to a little stream that was silvery with sunlight and tinkled as if small bells were hidden in the grass that grew by its cool banks. Jesus walked right into the water and sat down in a waist deep pool. The children laughed and lay down on the grass to watch the water ripple past. “Now children,” Jesus began, “Here is another way to understand God. Pretend that this is God’s great river of life, flowing everywhere, in earth and sea and through the air—made of pure spirit.”

"It's pretty small for that, isn't it?" Jacob said. The children giggled and agreed.

"Well, I said pretend. You children haven't lost your ability to imagine wild things have you?"

"No!" shouted a little girl named Rebekah. I can imagine that I am as big as the sky and can eat the moon like a cookie."

"Yes, yes! That's the way, let your imagination soar and play," Jesus shouted and splashed her. She squealed, and all the children laughed. "Now listen carefully," he said. "I am in the river, can you see?"

"Of course" said Jacob, "In the river and wet."

"Yes, all wet with God's life. That's me. And the river of life is flowing freely through me and from me and I am calling for you to come in with me and be wet too. You three," Jesus said, pointing to Ruth, Nathan and a boy named David, "Come and sit in the stream with me." They looked at each other, wondering who would be crazy enough to do it. Suddenly little David jumped in, splashing water up all around him, then the other two followed and the three sat down next to Jesus, the water up to their chins.

"That's good," Jesus said. "Now, you children on the shore, I can tell you how cool and good it is to sit in this stream on a hot summer day, but unless you get in the water you won't really know if what I'm saying is true. These three with me, they know, don't you."

"We sure do," Ruth said as she blew bubbles in the stream that rose almost to her nose.

"So, you must dive into God to know what God is like," Jesus said, "Just as you must come here, where we are, to know what this bubbling, laughing river of life feels like with your body, what it is to drink from it and to play in its brightness, and what's more..." Jesus suddenly jumped up and splashed all the children on the shore.

With that, pandemonium broke out. The children all tumbled into the stream and started splashing Jesus and each other, wildly laughing, choking, shouting, spitting out water, and throwing it high in the air. Some of the girls started singing and spinning around, letting the little silver droplets they threw high fall back upon them.

Jacob was dunking little David in the stream, so Jesus dunked him. Jacob came up, coughing water and glaring. Jesus only smiled, and then climbed

up on the shore. David laughed at Jacob who responded by dunking him once more.

Jesus watched them as he shook water from his hair and wrung it from his robe. Then he suddenly turned and strode across the fields towards a little forest of pine trees on a hill. The children keep playing for a while, then one by one ran after Jesus until they were all walking together, sopping wet.

Jesus stopped in an open meadow where a huge oak tree stood, spreading its twisted branches out amidst the pines like a wooden flame. Jesus stared at the tree, sighed, and spit upon the ground, then spread his arms out wide and slowly turned around, gazing up into the sky, whispering God's name. When he stopped he said, "Each of you is like this great tree. Now you are just tiny sprigs sprouting, but you are growing towards a greatness you cannot imagine.

"Once you know how to put your roots down deep and drink my hidden Love, you will spread your minds and hearts wide open to the heavens—and singing birds will come!" Jesus looked up into the empty sky and shouted, "Wa, yaheeee!"

At his voice countless birds suddenly flew out of the trees and began whirling around them. The children spun about, confused at first, and then became wildly excited. Jesus reached out his hands and several birds hovered above them. The children started dancing and waving their arms as if they too were little flyers. Little Ruth reached out her hands and cried as a sparrow landed on her head then fluttered, joining the cloud of birds that noisily twirled through the meadow and the trees.

Jesus brightly smiled and lifted his arms to the sky. "These birds are like God's angels," he said, "who fly on swift wings to bring you news of God's Love day and night. Open your heart to them. Give them a home in which to sing. Then, what you hear in secret shout aloud, and you will be children of the Light, beloved by your Father who is in heaven!"

Jesus watched as the children chased the birds excitedly around, then took two of the smallest children by their hands and led them out of the trees into a field filled with wildflowers. The rest of the children soon followed.

A warm breeze was blowing from the sea, making the flowers dance. Jesus found a grassy place dense with flowers and sat down. The children gathered around him. He picked a ladybug off his robe and put it carefully on Rebekah's ear. Ruth stuck a little blue flower in his beard. He hugged her,

and then took the flower in his hand saying, "Please understand, that this is what God's kingdom is like."

"First you said God is like a fish, then a river, then a tree and birds— now a flower? I don't get it," said Jacob, still a bit upset about Jesus dunking him.

"Of course you don't. You don't understand anything!" said David. Jacob gave him a nasty glare.

"Don't pay them any mind," said Rebekah. "They're brothers and they are always fighting. They make trouble everywhere they go."

"Jesus," said a little girl named Miriam, pulling on his sleeve. "Please tell us what you mean. How is God's kingdom like a flower? I want to know."

Jesus touched her nose with his finger and smiled. "Well, little one, listen carefully. God is like a sun inside, a warm light of Love that can shine right within your hearts and open them wide. And when God moves through us, His spirit is free and fresh like the wind. If you learn to open to Him, like these flowers open to the light, then whenever His spirit moves, you will dance in His wind, like they dance upon the breeze."

Ruth put another little flower in his beard. He hugged her, and then looked once more at Jacob and David who seemed to have already forgotten their conflict, put his head back in the grass, looked briefly at the sky and closed his eyes.

The children laid for a long while with Jesus, some of them watching the butterflies that came and wove amongst them in crazy, wayward whirls. Others rolled over and rested in the warm sun as their clothes dried. Several girls put their heads on Jesus' stomach, listening to the music of cicadas and the wind moving past in the long grass. Soon, they were all asleep.

Jesus himself dropped into dreams that made him groan, and at other times laugh. They slept together, arms and legs intertwined all willy-nilly until the sun began to drop low in the sky. Jesus awoke, looked around at the children, then smiled for a moment, feeling the Great Love move through him like honey pouring from a hot pan. Then he got up and stretched as the children slowly stirred, still held in a sleepy spell by the warm sun and the fragrance of flowers.

"Let's go to back to the sea," Jesus said, as he went quickly around, tousling hair, rubbing backs and getting them on their feet. "Soon we must part. I'm going to distant mountains to pray, and you must return to your homes."

With that said, he took little Miriam by the hand and they went walking down the sloping field through high grass with fat bees humming in the air.

All the children, having fully recovered their wild energy, were soon running everywhere. A group of boys ran far ahead and began climbing a huge stone. Jacob was the first one to the top. He stood there alone, hands held high. As little David tried to pull himself up, Jacob pushed him back saying, "Off my mountain throne, you. I'm the king here." David fell and landed hard on the rocks below. When Jesus arrived the boys had gathered around him. He was groaning and weeping.

Jesus looked at Jacob with all the love of one who knows human hearts and the secrets that they're keeping. Jacob glanced at Jesus, winched and then said, "I'm sorry, David. I didn't mean to hurt you." David was holding his knee, which was swollen, and bleeding. Jesus looked at it carefully, then spit on his fingers and rubbed it gently. As the children watched the knee seemed to grow light and airy, then the wound closed and the swelling was gone. The children gasped.

"How did you do that?" Jacob asked.

Jesus smiled. "I told you, I am the Light of life that is in you. In me there is no sickness, nothing harmed. David's spirit is in truth within me. So when the Light in my hand touched the Light in his knee, no wound could remain in that kiss." The children all nodded, somehow perfectly understanding.

Jesus took David by the hand and stood him up. "When you tell your family about this tonight, tell them that even when people act without love and blind to the light, causing suffering and darkness and so much needless pain, I still love you, always. It is my Love that heals human hurts and turns everything around."

David bent his knee. It was perfectly healed. "I sure will," he said, and then stuttered, "Thank you, Jesus, for making me well."

Jesus tousled his hair. Jacob bent down and ran his fingers over David's knee where just a moment ago was a wound. Then he put his arms around him and they hugged each other. And Jacob said, "I love you, little brother."

"Jesus smiled, and said, "Come, the sea lies before us, and I have one more story to tell." He jumped up, taking two children by the hands, and motioned to the others to spread out in a single line, arm in arm. "Are you ready?" he shouted.

"We are ready," they shouted in return, and all began marching joyfully down the field towards the great blue expanse of Galilee.

The children began singing and laughing as the sun painted the earth and sky gold. Each of them felt that somehow, if only for this moment, the earth really was God's home.

"Children," Jesus cried.

"Yes," they shouted back.

"My Love is without limits!"

"Yes, yes!" They all replied. "And we are in it."

"Hallelujah, Holy Papa." Jesus shouted to the sky, and they all broke out in laughter as birds twirled by.

When they reached the shore they all ran in a row knee deep in the water. The sea breeze, now stronger, wildly flapped their clothes and tangled their hair. Jesus stared at them, one by one, as if he was seeing what would come

to the lives each would live, and where they would go, and what they would choose, and all they would win and lose, and the love they would learn to know. Then he opened his arms and called them to him again. "Come children, now we must part, but I will remain with you, and am forever in your hearts."

"But, Jesus," Jacob said, "you said you had one more tale to tell us."

"Yes, but it is a tale that will take your whole life to hear. It is the story of each of your lives that you are writing with me. And you all will share your stories when we are gathered together again, free in my Father's kingdom. Then, after every deed you do is done and every earthly sorrow has passed by, your faces will shine brighter than the sun up in the sky.

With that said, he wrapped his arms around them as they pressed their bodies close to each other and to him. "Now its time for you all to go home again. Love each other, little children, for my sake and your own."

"We will, Jesus. We will," they said, gazing up into his face.

With a smile and a wave of his hand, Jesus turned and walked towards the sunlit hills and the sacred places where he prayed, as the children, laughing

and hugging each other, raced towards their village homes, splashing through the water in the shadows on the shore.